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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 GENEVA 001380

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, PRM  
USEU FOR MEZNAR, USUN FOR MALY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2010

TAGS: [PREF UNHCR](#)

SUBJECT: UNHCR: NEW COMMISSIONER OFF TO A STRONG START,  
FOCUSED ON BURUNDI

Classified By: DCM Lynn Cassel for reasons 1.4 B AND D

(C) Summary: Incoming High Commissioner Antonio Guterres is having a strong impact on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), even though he does not officially start until June 15. On June 2, Guterres held an "all staff" meeting in Geneva and sent a letter to field-based staff. In both communications, he stressed his intention to focus on UNHCR's core mandate and expressed his respect for the challenges faced by field staff. Although some voiced concern about "another politician" following the painful term of former HC Ruud Lubbers, UNHCR staff members said they were generally impressed by Guterres' energy, eloquence, and focus on the mandate. Guterres' specific praise for Assistant High Commissioner Kamel Morjane (widely considered his chief competitor for the HC position) was greatly appreciated, as was his ability to switch back and forth from English to French. On June 3, Guterres took decisions on some critical -- and long-pending -- administrative issues, then focused his attention on the situation in Burundi/Rwanda. Guterres ordered staff to take four specific actions related to Burundi/Rwanda (described below.) On Guterres' instructions, acting High Commissioner Wendy Chamberlin spoke with Ambassador Moley seeking U.S. diplomatic interventions with the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda. Chamberlin repeated this same plea to the UK Ambassador, while Guterres reportedly spoke directly with PRM A/S Dewey and EC Commissioner Louis Michel. According to UNHCR staff, Guterres and Michel had three conversations over the weekend, interspersed by Michel's calls to the Presidents of Burundi and Rwanda. As of June 6, Guterres has not yet taken a decision on whether to travel to Burundi/Rwanda June 120. End Summary.

RWANDA/BURUNDI

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12. (C) Guterres is thinking about traveling to Rwanda/Burundi during his first full week on the job, which coincides with World Refugee Day (June 20). Some senior UNHCR officials believe the promise of this visit could motivate the Governments of Burundi and Rwanda to take necessary steps to cease refolement and provide better protection and assistance to the refugees. Guterres instructed UNHCR to take the following steps:

- acting HC Wendy Chamberlin to contact Ambassador Moley and his UK counterpart officially seeking our diplomatic interventions with the two governments;
- acting HC Chamberlin to consult with UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour to ensure collaboration of efforts;
- UNHCR to deploy an emergency team to conduct Refugee Status Determinations (RSDs) and to register the refugee population. This team is to include officers with a special focus on women and children;
- UNHCR to make it clear to both sides that UNHCR wants to help find a solution but that this help is conditioned on no interference in its registration effort and on a cessation of pressure for the refugees to return immediately to Rwanda. The "carrot" to be offered along with this firm message is that new HC Guterres will travel to the region on his first trip and will highlight positive steps, if they are taken, by both sides. In describing Guterres' thinking, acting HC Chamberlin stressed that Guterres has not yet decided to go and will only do so if it can be part of a solution. Guterres is likely to travel to Addis Ababa to consult with the Africa Union, if he cannot travel to Rwanda for World Refugee Day.

13. (C) In a separate conversation, the UNHCR Officer for Rwanda and Burundi told Mission Officer that, per field reports, the Rwandans are now trying to reduce the profile of the issue. The UNHCR officer commented that the Rwandans seem to want a Guterres visit, but not with refolement at the top of his agenda. They seem to be trying to defuse the situation. The GOR reportedly has agreed to UNHCR participation in their next consultations with the GOB on the issue.

#### Other Administrative Decisions

14. (SBU) In his first days in Geneva, Guterres reportedly also decided:

-- to accept donors' (including the U.S.'s) desire to increase the perceived independence of the Inspector-General by amending the I-G's terms of reference to include notation that the High Commissioner would not dismiss an I-G without prior consultation with the Executive Committee (ExCom).

-- to continue to pursue a new position of Assistant High Commissioner for Protection.

-- to move forward with the creation of a Results Based Management office, under the Deputy High Commissioner, and to look at the structure of budget and planning functions.

15. (C) Comment: Guterres seems to have gotten off to a strong start with his senior Management Team. Chamberlin speaks highly of him, while Assistant High Commissioner Morjane -- who was also in the running for the HC job -- reportedly greatly appreciated positive remarks during the all staff meeting. Morjane seems to be re-thinking his desire to leave immediately, although he is still pursuing other possibilities within the UN or with the Tunisian government. Lower-level UNHCR staff with whom Mission officers spoke also were extremely positive about their first impressions of Guterres. Guterres has scheduled a courtesy call with Ambassador Moley June 14. His June plans also include a week of June 27 trip to New York and Washington. In New York, he plans to meet the Secretary-General (SYG), Deputy SYG Frechette, Relief Coordinator Egeland, other UN agency heads, and key NY-based NGOs. In Washington, he hopes to meet the Secretary and A/S Dewey as well as Washington-based NGOs.  
Moley